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ABSTRACT

This report describes training programs for paraprofessionals to accommodate the rapid growth of special education services in rural Kansas. Developed and implemented by state and local education agencies, the programs are based on the performance competencies established for paraprofessionals, and certification is enforced through the State Department of Special Education. Two federally funded grants have been awarded to the Kansas State Department of Education and the Kansas Association of Community Colleges to provide further support in meeting the training needs. Development of materials are under way to provide skills training at the community college level for special education paraprofessionals who work in integrated, cross-categorical, and early childhood classroom environments. Specific objectives of training programs are addressed. The State of Kansas purchased a licensure and several sets of media material for the First Start Program, which prepares paraprofessionals to care for children with special needs and to assist parents of special need children. In addition, many media resources are available for loan through the state department of education to supplement training programs. Facilitators develop and implement programs and recruit trainees in their geographical areas. Interactive television courses are used in the training program. (LP)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESERVICE TRAINING FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS AND RELATED SERVICES PERSONNEL IN RURAL KANSAS

Progress In Kansas

With the enactment of P.L. 94-142, children with special learning needs were provided the right to a free and appropriate educational program, which, based on the individual needs of the student, is to be provided in the least restrictive environment and to prepare that student for independence. This has resulted in a rapid growth and expansion of special education services. Paired with the growth of special education services has been the use of related services personnel, specifically the instructional paraprofessional. A number of factors have been cited as reasons for the increased use of the paraprofessional (Firth & Lindsey, 1982; Vasa, Streckelberg & Ronnig, 1983), the most critical being a partner in the instructional process (Evans & Evans, 1986).

The State of Kansas, in a period of about ten years, has brought paraprofessional training to a level exemplary to other states. According to 1990 state records 3,976 paraprofessionals were trained through 135,417.23 inservice hours and a total of 5,135 college hours were obtained by paraprofessionals statewide. This training is a result of the Kansas State Department of Education developing and coordinating the statewide paraprofessional facilitator system, developing and circulating administrative and training materials, developing and coordinating a community college facilitator system and evaluating and auditing local programs. This process has been formalized as the role of the paraprofessional, and has been designed by law (K.S.A. 72-962). A training proficiency model consisting of three levels of certification has been established with a minimum number of 20 clock hours per year for each paraprofessional and is enforced through the state department of special education. State sponsored workshops assist local education agencies with this training. A statewide annual paraprofessional workshop was created to expedite the training plans. Currently the State of Kansas has progressed into further refinement of the third phase of the Facilitator Model, the institutionalization and formalization of preservice level training at the State's community college system. Programmatic concepts and lessons are being developed that will be valuable to other states facing the same problems of resources and expanding needs. In an era of scarce monetary resources and expanding special education needs, this effort to effectuate, train and utilize paraprofessionals is a significant goal.

Currently, a number of performance competencies have been indentified as being needed within the repertoire of a competent instructional paraprofessional (Kelly, 1986; Evans & Evans

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1986). Among these are materials development and planning skills, behavior management skills, communication and interpersonal skills , and instructional management skills. To meet these competencies, training programs and materials have been developed and are currently available for loan. Further support is provided by two federally funded grants awarded to the Kansas State Department of Education and the Kansas Association of Community Colleges for joint administration. The objectives of the two grants are coordinated in such a way as to impact preservice training of paraprofessionals. One of the components of the project is to provide comprehensive preservice training model including a competency based core curriculum which includes practicum classroom experience at the community college level. Additionally, appropriate training materials and media will be developed for specialized skill training in the areas of integrated, interrelated, and early childhood classroom environments.

Specialized Paraprofessional Skill Training

Integration Programs

Children with disabilities should have access to the same school and community environments and activities as their same-aged peers. Determination of educational placement and access to regular education environments should be based upon a student's individual needs and not his or her disability.

Attending a neighbor school enables students with disabilities to interact with students and adults from their home community on a regular basis. The promotion of understanding and friendships between students with and without disabilities is emphasized as a valued educational activity.

A primary goal of public schools has always been to prepare students for adult life. This goal is the same for students with intensive educational needs. Training paraprofessionals to function in the integrated classroom settings will assist with preparation of students, regardless of disability, for adult life within integrated community settings. This means that students requiring certain services on a "day by day" basis and who are in regular classrooms will have professional staff. This staff may need assistance to meet particular needs of the student with a disabling condition when providing appropriate services and, therefore, will function as part of a specialized team which will include trained paraprofessionals.

Grant objectives include developing a training program to be used with paraprofessionals working in the integrated classroom. This phase of the project includes, completing the literature search, surveying local school personnel working in integrated services, summarizing competencies, validating competencies, defining training objectives and selecting the delivery systems for the curriculum.

Tentative areas of competencies for the curriculum are listed below:

*Communication with special education and general education practitioners about student schedules, instructional goals and evaluating student progress in an integrated/inclusive setting.

*One-on-one tutoring of students in academic subjects using lesson plans and instructional strategies developed by teachers and other professional support staff.

*Operation of computers and adaptive equipment that will enable students with disabilities and other special needs to participate fully in general education.

*Motivation of students to participate in extra-curricular activities and to strengthen skills that will enable students with special needs to become more independent by monitoring and controlling their own behavior.

*Communication with students in their preferred language.

*Assistance of children and youth with disabling conditions to develop self-esteem, develop autonomy, and participate in group activities in the school and community.

*Use of developmentally and age appropriate instructional procedures.

*Knowledge of health, safety and emergency procedures developed by agency.

*Ability to provide special care or physical assistance for students when appropriate.

*Ability to provide instructional assistance and monitoring of large and small groups.

*Ability to collect data, observe and evaluate situations which may relate to learning, problem solving or behavior.

Cross-Categorical Programs

Material is under development for the training of the paraprofessional in the cross-categorical classroom. The number of cross-categorical programs in Kansas has mushroomed over the past three years, likewise the paraprofessionals in the area continue growing at a rapid pace. Records show 914 paraprofessionals working in cross-categorical programs. Types of programs represented in this group are LD/EMR, LD/BD, LD/EMR/BD, EMR/TMR and TMR/SMH. Curriculum developed at this time places emphasis on paraprofessional preparation for familiarization with and implementation of instructional materials, instructional methods, behavior control techniques, utilization of technical terminology and interpersonal skills required to work as part of a team.

Early Childhood Programs

With the implementation of Public Law 99-457 in the fall of 1991, education of all 3-5 year old children with special needs will be the responsibility of the public school system. Therefore, more three, four and five year old children with special needs than ever before will be in public schools. It is the hope of the State of Kansas that this will be a positive experience and that community college training will contribute to quality programs. In preparation for fall of 1991 the State of Kansas purchased a licensure and several sets of media for First Start training which makes possible the training of paraprofessionals in the State of Kansas.

First Start is a nationwide program located at the University of Colorado Health and Sciences Center School of Nursing (UCHSC) in Denver. First Start trains home and center child caregivers, foster parents, education aides, and other paraprofessionals in the care of infants and toddlers with special needs. Such training facilitates paraprofessionals' confidence to care for infants and toddlers with special needs in the same settings in which they care for non-disabled children. Only an estimated five percent of all child caregivers have the training needed to care for children with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Workers often are afraid of children with special needs or are reluctant to deal with special equipment and routines required by these children.

The First Start Program was initiated in 1985 with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. First Start is being used to address Part H, P.L. 99-457 in Colorado.

First Start has a two level approach. The first level brings together health, education, and social services professionals from throughout the country to attend a five-day training session to learn about course dissemination. Upon completion, these professionals 1) are prepared to deliver the 45-hour First Start course of the care of children with special needs to paraprofessionals; 2) can facilitate teaching of the course by interdisciplinary professionals; 3) have familiarity with the procedures used to train professionals; 4) know the available resources used in teaching the 35 lesson plans in First Start, as well as using the audio-visuals obtained through the First Start office.

When paraprofessionals complete the 45-hour First Start course in the area, they have the ability to do the following: 1) begin care for children with disabilities; 2) practice the best kinds of infant care and child rearing practices for children with chronic illnesses and disabilities; 3) help parents and other family members with the special needs of children with chronic illnesses and disabilities; 4)listen to information from the experiences of parents who are adjusting to the care of children with special needs; 5) share information with families of children with special needs and their parents; 6) help in the evaluation of care of children with special needs that is given in the child care home or center and that carries over into the home environment.

First Start classes are divided into four major categories. These are Human Development, Chronic Conditions, Communication and Community Support.

In November, 1990 a training program was held at Barton County Community College for 26 trainers. Six community colleges and 11 local schools or cooperatives were represented. Training sessions at six locations around the state have been implemented.

Training Media Library

Many pieces of media are available for loan to supplement community college training and local education agency training programs. Available paraprofessional media may be divided into the following seven categories. Early Childhood items include cassettes, slides, video tapes and transparencies to accompany the following lesson topics: Down Syndrome, Congenital Heart Defects, Seizures, CPR/Choking, Spina Bifida, Infection Control, Respiratory Conditions, Attitudes, Auditory Impairments, Adaptive Equipment, Visual Impairments, Feeding, Oxygen Therapy, Observation, and Positioning & Handling. Systems supporting paraprofessional functioning are presented through media presentations on the topics of Public Law 94-142, The Facilitator Model and a Core Curriculum for Training Paraprofessionals. Media which presents orientation and new perspectives for various audiences includes videos explaining paraprofessional job orientation for groups such as administrators, general teachers, and paraprofessionals. Other general orientation films include paraprofessionls in rural education, paraprofessionals in a variety of settings, and types of students with whom special education paraprofessionals work in instructional programs. Another type of media has been developed to give paraprofessionals an overview of various disabilities such as learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, hearing impaired, visually impaired, physically handicapped, severely mutliply handicapped children and youth, speech and language handicapped and gifted students. Types of programs reviewed are bilingual, homebound, adaptive physical education, art therapy, pre -vocational and vocational, least restrictive environment, instructional media centers, school psychology, and school social work. Finally, teaching skills are presented in the areas of behavioral control, communications, educational environment, instructional process, classroom management, emergency first aid, and the computer.

Statewide Training System

Three statewide systems which support training of paraprofessionals in Kansas include the fiber-optic communication and instruction system, the paraprofessional facilitator system and the community college facilitator system.

Paraprofessional Facilitator Training Model

A "Facilitator Model" was created to develop a necessary personnel structure and to expedite and provide a more efficient plan for training. Paraprofessionals represent a large, nonhomogeneous and scattered group across the broad geography of Kansas. As stated previously, there are over 3,900 paraprofessionals in thirty-three different categorical programs in a state 412 miles from east to west and 206 miles from northern to southern boundary. Large clusters of paraprofessionals exist in the urban areas of Kansas City, Topeka, and Wichita. In

education cooperatives centered around Colby, Dodge City, Garden City, Hutchinson, and Salina. The Colby Cooperative a serves over 10,000 square miles.

The major objective of paraprofessional training in Kansas has been to promote the proficiency of the special education paraprofessional. Proficiency has been defined in three levels and set out by Permit Levels One, Two and Three. The first step in moving toward proficiency is to have all paraprofessionals obtain a Level One Permit, each paraprofessional must participate in at least four inservice sessions for a total of 20 clock hours as required by the state for personnel reimbursement. Application for the permit is made by the employing district to the State Department of Education. The local education agency or paraprofessional may choose to substitute all or part of the inservice hours with an equivalent amount of college training taken during the year. The paraprofessional permit defines its possessor as a "special education paraprofessional". Paraprofessionals, by law (K.S.A. 72-962), are permitted to perform instructional tasks, whereas teacher aides are designated, by law, to "supervise pupils for noninstructional activities" (K.S.A. 72-1106). The next objective for training is to elevate the paraprofessional beyond minimum program standards. Requirements for Permit Level Two are two years of experience as an instructional paraprofessional, and the completion of 30 semester college hours, an equivalent of 450 clock hours of inservice training, or a combination of college and inservice training hours to total 450 clock hours. One hour of college credit is equated as 15 clock hours. Requirements for Permit Level Three, are the completion of the three years of experience or an equivalent of 900 clock hours of inservice training, completion of the 60 semester college hours, or a combination of the two to total 900 clock hours.

Presently, workshops sponsored by the Kansas State Department of Education provide approximately 16 hours of inservice training in two sessions, a regional workshop and a statewide conference. Many districts rely on the state sponsored activities to assist them in meeting their training requirements. Through these sessions, paraprofessionals have been able to obtain the minimum level of proficiency through a combination of state and local resources. As mentioned previously, the local education agencies are not able to provide the minimum amount of training without drawing on state-sponsored workshops.

Rules, guidelines, and monitoring techniques are important components of the Kansas program, which is built, in concept and operation, on a "Facilitator Model". This model is built on the use of representatives (called facilitators) from the local educational agencies, private and institutional settings. The facilitators are trained by state department of education specialists. In turn, these local representatives help develop programs for paraprofessionals in their local areas and then recruit and train personnel.

The Kansas State Department of Education is responsible for developing and coordinating the statewide facilitator system, developing and circulating administrative and training materials, and evaluating and auditing local programs.

Standards for the use of paraprofessionals are outlined in a state facilitator model manual, various audiovisual programs, and a pamphlet has been developed for training.

The facilitator model is as much a communication model as a training model. It is designed to communicate facts and attitudes from the state level, through an intermediary (facilitator), to the local education agency directly involved in providing services to exceptional children. Also, as trainers, the facilitators develop and implement local training programs for paraprofessionals. Often the facilitator plays the role of mentor to paraprofessionals, administrators and teachers, especially when those new to the system are not aware of the role of the paraprofessional. Facilitators may be special education directors or assistant directors, teachers, paraprofessionals, or other support personnel.

Other objectives of the facilitator model include:

*Directing the development of programs
*Developing training materials
*Involving state colleges and universities in training teachers to work with paraprofessionals
*Assisting community colleges in developing paraprofessional training programs.
*Fostering an inter-state paraprofessional communication network

Community College Facilitator Model

Development of paraprofessional training sequences at the community college level is one method to institutionalize the necessary training. Community colleges in Kansas are attached to the higher education system, but are given the authority to contract with unified school districts to provide services. A core curriculum helps to maintain uniformity among training programs.

In Kansas, 19 community colleges have been identified as the institutions which will deliver preservice paraprofessional training. Training programs through an "inservice/preservice" model are employed particularly with paraprofessionals and other non-degreed support staff. They have already begun in several of the colleges and the coordination and expansion of these efforts is the next goal. With the administration of the community college system under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education, this arrangement offers a unique opportunity to develop a centralized coordinated network for preservice training of paraprofessionals in Kansas. Kansas Community Colleges have established an agreement by which each institution covers a specific service area. This agreement of territorial limitation promotes a greater willingness to seek uniformity among programs throughout the state and avoid wasteful duplication of training opportunities.

The community college facilitator model is similar to the paraprofessional model. An individual from the college is appointed facilitator and they assist with program implementation and recruitment of students in the paraprofessional career area. Selection of this individual is crucial to the success of the training program. Training is offered through different community college

programs and the facilitator will be especially knowledgeable when representing that program and when setting up paraprofessional training. Presently, many of the 19 community college facilitators have the following positions: Dean of Instruction, Dean of Outreach and Curriculum, Dean of Community Education and Director of Continuing Education.

The following core curriculum has been developed through federal grants as a culmination of other statewide activities to provide support for development of community college preservice programs.

Four basic competency areas have emerged and have been included in the core curriculum. The basic areas are communication skills, behavior management techniques, the instructional process and arranging the education environment. The core curriculum consists of the following courses:

*Overview of special education paraprofessionalism
*Overview of special education categorical areas
*Behavior and classroom management
*Human growth and development
*General instructional competencies for special education paras
*Courses in professional and personal skills
*A set of electives
*A practicum consisting of varied course credit

The community college system plans to meet needs of paraprofessionals based on geographical and cyclical information. One of three types of programs may be offered depending upon information collected. An associates of arts degree is made available through an approved program of study at the state level. The AA degree program is the most permanent arrangement of course offerings in the college and requires a minimum of 64 hours of study. The vocational certificate program requires fewer hours of study and the Business/Industrial programs are offered one course at a time in a temporary and very flexible manner. In the State of Kansas there are five community colleges offering degree programs, five community colleges offering some course work and six community colleges offering vocational certificates to paraprofessionals. Two of the community colleges offer programs in interpretor training.

The advantages of the community college system usually include: student housing, child care, food service, special services for disabled students, adult basic education, basic skill training, career planning, placement, intercollegiate and intramural athletics, testing/assessment, student activities, student government, counseling, and clubs and organizations.

Another attractive feature of the community college system is student financial services. Need-based assistance and other financial assistance is available to both full-time and half-time students. Need based assistance is in the form of grants, scholarships, vocational rehabilitation funds, Bureau of Indian Affairs funds, federal government five percent loans, deferred payment loans and

Bureau of Indian Affairs funds, federal government five percent loans, deferred payment loans and college work study programs. Other financial assistance takes the form of athletic grants, vocational education scholarships, veterans educational benefits, supplemental loans for students/parent loans, employment opportunities and notetaker stipends for students who wish to take notes for hearing-impaired students in their classes.

Community College Facilitator Role

* Mentor students in paraprofessional programs by answering questions and providing information on benefits such as possible child care while in class and financial assistance services provided by thecommunitycollege.
* Coordinate between paraprofessionals, local school systems/cooperatives and appropriate community college programs to establish new classes for paraprofessional training.
* Coordinate with the community college program instructor and the State Director of Community College Programs to complete the course accreditation process. This facilitates the process of transferring credits to a four year institution if the student desires.
* Coordinate with the State Department of Special Education and KACC Paraprofessional Programs to provide information to area community colleges about courses and training material specifically created for paraprofessionals training.
* Coordinate the establishment of classes off campus when necessary. Community colleges have the flexibility to send an instructor and materials out to the local school or a central location to accommodate student travel distance and schedules.
* Provide assistance when requested by recommending qualified instructors in the area for specific paraprofessional training courses where requested.
* Promote consistency in courses by providing consultation resources and media information fron the State Department of Special Education and KACC Paraprofessional Programs.
* Actively work with paraprofessional student recruitment, career awareness and career development.

Statewide Fiber Optic Training Model

Paraprofessionals were the first completers of the First Class presented through the fiber-optic system in Kansas. This system provides the capability for a classroom to actually be extended to different locations without losing the interaction between students and the teacher or among the classrooms and students in other classrooms. The instructor can see all of the classrooms and students concurrently. Students can ask questions of the teacher at any time during the class period. When the teacher responds to questions, all students can see and hear both the student asking the question and the teacher answering it. A teacher can ask a question and see all of the students before indicating which student should respond. All other students can see both the respondent and the teacher answering the questions.

As our smaller rural communities continue to lose health care and other social services, it is feasible that the school will be the site where many of their services can be consolidated. The schools already have nurses, psychologists, counselors, food service and space for physical conditioning. In order to maintain some form of quality of life in small communities and/or increase the success rate of the poorly motivated, underachieving student, some of the schools will have to restructure their role in the community to provide services to the underserved.

This training model will make it possible to train paraprofessionals in areas such as the Colby cooperative which serves 10,000 square miles. Currently small networks around the state have been formed with plans for much more extensive connections within this next year. The following network connections are currently available: Eight schools in the northwest section, ten schools in the southwest section, nine schools in the south central section and three in the southeast section. An Exceptional Child class for paraprofessionals mentioned earlier was completed in the summer of 1990 using the fiber optic system of instruction in the southwest section.

Kansas Paraprofessional Training Program Growth

Evidence of acceptance and support of the role of the paraprofessional in the state of Kansas can be seen as time passes. Ten years ago paraprofessionals received hourly wages with no benefits in many schools. As of the 1990 school year, the majority of school districts provide job descriptions, salary schedules, career ladders, contracts, evaluations and sick leave or personal days.

As stated at the opening of this paper, increased use of paraprofessionals requires training. The state of Kansas has developed systems and curriculum to meet this training need with the goal in mind of preparing students for independence in the least restrictive environment.

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